Interview with Theodore R. Britton Jr.

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR THEODORE R. BRITTON, JR.

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: March 29, 1989

Q: Mr. Britton served as ambassador to Barbados and Grenada, and was the US Special Representative to the Caribbean Associated States from 1974-77. He is presently Assistant to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development in International Affairs since 1981. Does that still hold?

BRITTON: Yes.

Q: Mr. Britton serves as Chairman of the US/People's Republic of China Agreement on Building and Construction and Urban Planning. Earlier in his career he was President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Baptist Management Corporation and Deputy Assistant Secretary of HUD. He graduated from New York University in 1952.

Mr. Ambassador, before we move into your time as Ambassador to Barbados and Grenada, could you tell me little about your background before you reached that time?

BRITTON: Actually, I'm a banker. I was mortgage officer and head of the mortgage department at Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association. From there I became president of the American Baptist Management Corporation. We had properties throughout the country. Then the stint in government as Deputy Assistant Secretary, and later as

ambassador. I returned to become Executive Vice President of the Logical Technical Services Corporation, and later President of United Mutual Life Insurance Corporation Company. From there, of course, back into government, where I've been since 1981.

Q: What developed your interest in foreign affairs?

BRITTON: Very good. Very good. It goes way back, starting when I was in the High School of Commerce in New York City. A number of us young black students came together to discuss the situation in Africa, and we decided we would set up a black African empire. But we didn't ask the Africans what they thought about all of this.

Q: We're talking about . . .

BRITTON: 1941, like that.

Q: Well that, of course, at the time, was colonial area.

BRITTON: Of course, yes, except Liberia. We talked about this, and what have you. It kind of whetted my interest in foreign matters.

By the time I reached the service—I was overseas in 1944, in Guadalcanal—I used to read a good bit about Ralph Bunch, who was sort of Executive Secretary, or something like that, to the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission. I began to get interested in what was then called the diplomatic and consular service. I dearly wanted to go into the diplomatic and consular service.

When I was near leaving the service, there was a push to get in new people into the diplomatic and consular service. They would take officers who qualified. However, Marine Corps did not allow blacks to become officers at all. The highest rank you could get was sergeant, which I eventually achieved. That threw me out.

So I began study at college later on, majoring in international finance to some extent, and all the subjects I could find related to international studies. But it continued to elude me and with the McCarthy years, I said, “Forget it.”

Q: Could you explain why the McCarthy years turned you off about this, and explain what the McCarthy years were?

BRITTON: At about 1950—I think it was there about—Senator McCarthy and the House of Representatives side began their great push. Sort of anti-communist.

Q: This is the Senator McCarthy on the Senate side and the House Un-American Activities Committee.

BRITTON: Yes. Began to do their systematic investigations—some would call it harassment, whatever you want to call it. It was such a harsh thing against the governmental employees especially. Other people suffered, but it was such a harsh thing against government employees. So many people that I had read about in my early years—and that I hadn't read about—were hounded out of government, that I decided then that I never wanted to be a part of that kind of thing. I never wanted to go into government and have that happen to me. So I just kept a big interest in foreign affairs, but I never went out of my way to seek any particular part in government. I had done a brief stint in government with the VA after coming out of the service.

Q: Veterans' Administration.

BRITTON: Veterans' Administration, yes. As I say, from that point on, I said, “Forget about it.” But I kept an interest. As I got more into national housing in 1964 with the American Baptist, it brought me more and more into contact with government through the Department of Housing.

Q: What sort of things were you doing with Housing?

BRITTON: The government was having a problem. It had begun to push the so-called non-profit housing corporations to promote them. But one organization that began to be quite a participant was a union out of Milwaukee which had internal problems. As a result they found themselves having to give up all of their housing interests. The government was then stuck with what to do with these corporations. They didn't want to take them back. They called upon us, the American Baptist Group, to come forward and become the sponsor. We set up a housing corporation to take over the sponsorship and to manage them. There were nine of them nation-wide—Massachusetts, New York, Wisconsin, California, nine all told. We took them over. But it meant working with individual offices nation-wide. Keep in mind that the Department of Housing and Urban Development had just become a cabinet department. There was no regional setup as such, so it was necessary to go from one office to the other. Sometimes I was educating a given office as to what the other was doing or what the national office was doing.

Q: This was also the beginning of President Johnson's war on poverty.

BRITTON: Yes. The housing law was passed about 1961 under President Kennedy. This was called the 221-D3 program.

We began to take them over, and by the time I left the American Baptist, which was 1971, we had about 23 housing developments. We were the largest in the country. I probably knew as much about this kind of socially-oriented housing management as anybody. As a matter of fact, I went to England to meet with the Institute of Housing Managers and learn what they were doing. Their history went back to 1850 or 1840, or thereabouts. I also met with the International Federation for Housing and Planning to meet other housing experts.

My relations with government was changed by this new relationship. Because of my interest and sort of expertise, I was invited to join the government by the person heading research and technology at the time at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Q: Who was that?

BRITTON: His name was Harry Finger. A very fine person. But I still had reservations. I wasn't interested in government as such. As time progressed, I mellowed a little bit, and at one point there was a thought of closing my office in New York, the headquarters of American Baptist, and moving it down to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. I wasn't exactly in favor of that—I'm sort of an urban person. The pastoral confines did not attract me at all.

Q: [Laughter] Good for vacations.

BRITTON: Just at that point, Harry Finger called me again. He had offered me all kinds of things. I was so naive that I wouldn't ask him what was the grade, what was the title, what was the pay. Suddenly, I said at that moment, “Yes. Go ahead and process it. I'll look at it, and I think I'll be interested.” And be proceeded to process it. I had to make out several forms and, in due course, I found myself coming down to join him.

Q: Moving to what is really the focus of this interview . . .

BRITTON: Now, how did I get into foreign!

Q: Yes.

BRITTON: Research in Housing and Urban Development and demonstration programs involved doing a lot of things in the country here. We were doing what at that time was called “Operation Breakthrough”—new technology, new techniques in planning, new materials, new laws, new concepts, and so forth. Harry Finger was a workhorse, and was doing quite a bit of the work domestically.

There was still a good bit to be learned overseas from other countries. They were much older, of course, obviously, than the US. The cities were older, their research was older, and so forth. I became interested in that.

I started meeting with U.N. groups, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the urban side, as well as other countries such as England, France, and Germany. In the course of my going to those meetings, suddenly, I was invited by the US Information Agency to lecture on housing and urban development in other countries. It gave me an opportunity to see what they were doing. I began to visit embassies to meet with housing officials, and this always has the benefit of broadening the outreach of a given embassy. Subjects in which they might normally not have a big interest . . .

Q: The normal embassy may be required to make a report now and then, but there's very little expertise.

BRITTON: They have no entre, basically. Yet some of the housing ministers were beginning to move ahead. They also had environment quite a bit. For example, the Housing Environmental Minister in England, I think, about two years later, became prime minister. So this had a sort of outreach.

Having met so many people at embassies and having to work closely with State Department, again, whetted my interest in international matters. I was getting some publicity from my travels from organizations as Jet magazine, and so on. I always have to thank Simeon Booker who did kind of publicize my travels. He's the Washington editor.

So out of it, eventually, the White House—I had good friends over at the White House—became interested in what I was doing, and about 1972 I was asked if I might be interested in an embassy—1973, I'm sorry—and I said, “Oh boy! Yes, of course.” But it was a long time between the summer of '73 and the fall of '74.

Q: Had you had any particular ties to the Republicans, because we're talking about, at this point, the Nixon Administration?

BRITTON: Nixon was still President. Yes. It was interesting, from my early days in New York I began to feel more comfortable with the Republican party. We had in Harlem at

that time what was called the United Young Republicans—I wasn't living in Harlem, but I worked over there at the Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association, which is located right in the center of Harlem—and I met people, for example, Sam Pierce and others. And, of course, Nelson Rockefeller had just become Governor and he was very active. His son was a member of the group—Rodman, that is. Steven, the other son, was teaching Sunday school at my church, the Riverside Church.

Q: The Rockefellers have always been in the Baptist Church, haven't they?

BRITTON: Yes. Steven was teaching at my church, Riverside Church, in fact, my children were in his classes. Eventually, I became a member of the Board of Trustees at Riverside—the Board of Deacons first, then the Board of Trustees. But I knew all of them—as a matter of fact, it was always a joke. I remember when I came to HUD—the fellow who was sort of a political person called me up for an interview and Harry Finger said I should go up to visit with him—they were a little suspicious of Harry at the Department because he was, I guess, a Democrat. Secondly, his organization seemed to have been largely white with no blacks in sort of any leadership positions. Last, but not least, because Harry came from NASA—he was an astronautical and aeronautical engineer—they figured that he had no housing expertise and, this being the Department of Housing, there was some little concern that, number one, his organization did not have any Republicans; number two, it did not have any blacks; number three, it did not have any housing expertise. When I met with this fellow, (the HUD Political Liaison) he began questioning me and I said, “You don't remember me, but we met up in Michigan. I was managing Housing up there and you came down from the state housing organization to speak.” With that, he remembered me and he mentioned something about Republicans, and I said, “Oh, yes. I have quite a number of friends,” and I spoke of the Executive Director of the Republican committee in New York, the Governor, my local leader.

And he said, “Well, how do you know these folks?”

I said, “I've been Republican pretty much most of my adult life,” and he was very happy. He told me sometime later that when I left the room he was dancing around the room because in one fell swoop, Harry Finger had gotten a Republican housing expert who happened to have been black. It was three for one. He said it was a coup. [Laughter]

Of course, research and technology was, in a sense, sort of like the Brahmans of the organization because you had all these hotshots out of the Apollo program at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. All were engineers pretty much, and so forth, but they were real hotshots. Suddenly he had as his number two person . . .

Q: When did the offer come? Did you have any idea of where you might be sent or why?

BRITTON: At this point, Stan Scott, who was then a Special Assistant to President Nixon —Stanley eventually went to Philip Morris after leaving government, became a millionaire, and now owns one the largest breweries down in Louisiana. Stan and I were friends. He called me one day and asked if I would be interested in an ambassadorship. I think the same thing had been asked in one of Simeon Booker's columns in Jet. He said that I would be interested in an ambassadorship if offered. Stan Scott called me and said, “Are you really interested?”

And I said, “Yes.”

“Well, we're going to have a number of them coming open, including Upper Volta. If you're interested, I'll certainly start pushing your name.”

Upper Volta, whose capitol is Ouagadougou, was once the embassy headed by one of my oldest friends, a fellow by the name of Ambassador Elliott Skinner. He and I sang in the glee club at New York University and knew each other over those years. Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, was not a great choice of mine, but I was interested in the Foreign Service so this would have been a natural lead-in. Eventually, Ouagadougou was filled by a career Foreign Service officer.But we continued to talk and I continued to put material forward

whenever I was asked for something. This continued throughout '73—I guess it must have been about the fall of '73. Very little was moving. Senators Javits and Buckley were my home state senators from New York. Each one sent a little note over to the White House, but not any grand push. By the way, I'm grateful to them because you can get maybe 101 recommendations that are positive, but get one negative one and you have serious problems. They never said anything negative about me.

So things were drifting along and I chose at that point to go back to call on the friendship of a person whom I had met earlier, Senator Strom Thurmond. I was born in South Carolina and still have a big interest in South Carolina. Senator Thurmond and I had met during the time I was working on what was called an “add-on bathroom” for South Carolina—houses. There are something like 150,000 homes in South Carolina without indoor plumbing. That had a lot to do with worm infestation and so on. We then worked out a situation whereby this add-on bathroom was designed by the University of South Carolina, it was financed by The Farmers Home Loan Administration, and would be administered by the Tennessee Valley Authority. It was going a long way to help out in South Carolina. He was very grateful and we struck up good friendship. I criticized him for some of his failure to do things in the past and he accepted my criticism and said that he was born in a different era in which people helped themselves.

Q: At one point, he was leading the arch-segregationists during '48, the Dixiecrats.

BRITTON: Yes, I reminded him. Of course, he had one of the best records in the entire Senate, a major general in the Army, he'd been Governor, he'd been State Senator, he'd been a judge, high school principal and coach. But I pointed out some of the terrible things that happened in South Carolina and things that had not been done even though he and others had held the highest positions—there was so much to be done. As I say, he accepted in good spirit and we began to be in regular touch.

He had sent me a note and said that any time he could be of help to me, let him know —"to use him," to quote his words. So I sent a note to him telling him of my interest and the fact that I could use his help at that time, and he sent a long personal letter to the new Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. Apparently, when that letter arrived, it triggered an immediately response and my telephone really began to ring. It was almost as if everybody was to told to get on it right away.

At that time, you remember, President Nixon was in serious trouble, and one of the three major underpinnings keeping him up was Strom Thurmond. Strom Thurmond, who represented the conservative side of the rightist side, never really attacked President Nixon, but one word from Senator Thurmond and it would have been all over. Suffice to say that I was then asked to come over.

Q: We're really talking about the Watergate period.

BRITTON: Yes. I was invited to come over to see Deputy Secretary Kenneth Rush, plus other people. In the meantime, my friends over at the White House—again, I have to interject the name of Gregory Lebede who was in charge of my interest in the position over there at the White House, he was in the personnel office—stuck with me throughout. He had called to say, "They're going to offer you Barbados, and I hope you're interested." He said, "You'd better be interested." [Laughter]When I met with Secretary Rush, the first thing I said to him was, "Let me, belatedly, wish you many happy returns," because his birthday was the previous day. Also, I pointed out that he knew a lot of my friends from New York. He had been Chairman of Union Carbide, he knew my friends up at the Presbyterian churches, he knew them at the Riverside Church, and so forth.

I have been on the Board of Trustees with some very important people. As a matter of fact, on the Board of Trustees at Riverside Church, I succeeded Winthrop Aldrich, former head of Chase Manhattan Bank in New York, uncle of Nelson Rockefeller, and brother-in-law of John D., Jr. There were a number of important people—Charles Tillinghast, President of

Trans World Airlines was on the Board. So we talked almost immediately about his friends, his experiences, his travels, his work and so forth. It was only after we had been talking about 20 minutes, he said, “Oh, my goodness. You're supposed to see some more people. I was only supposed to take 5 minutes with you. By the way, we're talking about Barbados, if that's all right with you.”

I said, “Sure.” And with that, I rushed off to keep the other appointments with the Director General of the Foreign Service, the Under Secretary for Management, the Assistant Secretary for Latin America. Many of the people I knew, for example, the Assistant Secretary for Latin America had been the Deputy Chief of Mission in Paris and I knew him from Paris. The meetings of the OECD took place there. So it was in a sense like old home week coming over there.

Q: Did the Department give you much in the way of briefing and how to be an ambassador before you went out?

BRITTON: No.

Q: I have to say, that this is not unusual for State Department employees, too. It's sort of “There it is, go do it.”

BRITTON: Keep in mind, I'm talking about December 5th of 1973. I was nominated on November 17th of 1974. There was a long hiatus.

Q: Why was that?

BRITTON: I think there was a natural slowness in the processing because there were so many other problems with government at the time—the Watergate thing.

Q: The Watergate thing just tied things up.

BRITTON: Yes. But in addition, there were a number of changes going on in the State Department and, secondly, they go through a sort of ritual, a procedure. At one point, for example, I found that one of my friends, who happens to be a career Foreign Service officer—he's retired now—his name Richard Fox, was on the list to be considered for the same post. I called Dick Fox and I said, “Dick, I'm going to tell them to take my name off.”

And he said, “Why?”

I said, “Well, number one, this is your career. To me it's something desirable but it's not my career. It's just something I've always been interested in. So I would take my name off and tell them that I support you.”

He said, “No. You stay where you are.”

Q: He went to Trinidad-Tobago.

BRITTON: Yes. He said, “Of course, I'm Deputy Inspector General over here and Deputy Director of the Foreign Service, so I can help you and I can look out for you. On the other hand, the other person does not have your qualifications.” There were three of us on the list. “They want it to be a non-career appointee, and since I am a career person, I am on the list merely to spike it. I can be knocked off immediately.” So he said, “You stay there and I can protect you.”

Things continued to drift along, and continued all through the summer. By the late summer, of course, Richard Nixon had resigned. But it so happened that when Gerald Ford came on as Vice President, Stan Scott, who had excellent credentials with the black media, black press, black community organizations, sort of became the one to introduce Gerald Ford to broad swath of community organizations—black and white. He and Stan had this kind of contact. He was a winner of the so-called Russworm Award for excellence

in journalism, and he had described, I think, the assassination of Malcolm X, and he knew a lot of people.

So Stan, having gotten to know President Ford quite well, when asked, “What about this Britton? Should we knock him off? After all, he's Nixon's man, not Ford's man?”

He said, “No, that's my personal one.” He was able to continue supporting me throughout and the nomination went forward again, this time under President Ford and in November I was nominated. Interestingly, by the way, I looked in the Digest of Presidential Documents over at my HUD library, my nomination doesn't show up in the Ford papers.

Q: Well, that's not usual as far as documentation of anything goes. You say there was really very little preparation when you arrived there.

BRITTON: At the State Department, when I was called forth for hearings at the Senate confirmation hearings, I had done a great deal of my own study.

There were ten political entities, by the way, besides Barbados, which was independent; Grenada, which was independent, then you had the five associated, sort of semi-independent countries, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Dominica, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, and Antigua. Then there were two colonies, Montserrat and British Virgin Islands. Eventually, Anguilla broke away from St. Kitts Nevis and became a third colony. So it was about ten political entities.

I studied their histories, learned the names of their ministers, some of their chief products, and so forth. I always remember this particular ambassador out in Malaysia, Malayar, I believe it was, who couldn't remember the name of his prime minister.

Q: I can't think of his name, but it was Sri Lanka—Ceylon in those days—and he couldn't remember the prime minister's name. I think everybody who's been in the trade now

knows that Madame Bandaranaike was the prime minister. Now that I think about it, I believe his name was like Klutz or Cluck. [Laughter]

BRITTON: [Laughter] It was. Maxwell Gluck. The problem was that in that area—I've been to Indonesia and Singapore—they have very long names.

Q: Very long names.

BRITTON: More often than not, they don't use one part of the name. Like Sukarno, we never heard his whole name. Symetro, We'd never hear the full name. Even the new current President of Indonesia, Suharto. Because the names are so long and I presume this man might have been intimidated, and at that point somebody suddenly pointed a finger in his face and said, “What's the name of the prime minister?” and he had a mental blank.

Q: It was very easy to do, but everybody remembers this.

BRITTON: Well, when I went for the confirmation hearings, one would have thought—I want to be kind to them—that the legislative people in the State Department were actually setting me up. It said that I had been in banking, it said that I had been in housing and that I had worked in the Department of Housing and Urban Development as a Deputy Assistant Secretary, and that I was from New York. It didn't say anything at all about my background and experience.

When I came to the committee, Senator Hubert Humphrey was presiding. Senator Sparkman, who was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, eventually came in. But when I sat down with them, I was asked if I wished to make a statement. I made quite a lengthy one, not to bore them but to tell them, and it was extemporaneous. I have never been particularly intimidated by the importance of people or overly awed by authority and position, so I proceeded to tell them that that piece of paper didn't describe my interests, or participation, exposure to or experience in foreign affairs at all. I said, “For

example, I've probably visited more embassies than maybe 90% of the Foreign Service officers.” I had lectured in such places as Germany, France, England, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Turkey, out into Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Mexico. I'd really been around, but it just didn't show all of this. And I said, “I know a great deal about it. Secondly, I've had a long-standing interest in foreign service from a very young age. I've also met with international organizations. I was a member of international organizations.”

So they said, “Well, we're very happy then. You've put us at ease, because we were worried that you were a novice and didn't know the first thing about such countries.”

I said, “No. I've probably been to about 50 or 70 countries.” With that, they began to talk about the Caribbean. I happen to know every one of the prime ministers' names, and some of their colleagues, plus, I knew the histories of the countries. Senator Clark, I believe, was the senator who was principally responsible for Latin American affairs. Of course, he lead and he was very happy that I knew as much as I did about those countries, plus the surrounding areas, and broadly about US foreign policy. I'm a great reader. As a matter of fact, Senator Javits arrived later. As he sat down, needless to say, he's the senior ranking minority member, he said, “Mr. Britton, I'm looking over your curriculum vita and I don't see much to recommend you for foreign experience.” The others said, “Oh no, Senator, we're quite satisfied. He's had a great deal of experience that doesn't show up on this piece of paper.”

With that, Senator Javits said, “Wait a minute, you're one of my constituents.”

I said, “Yes, sir.”

“As a matter of fact, I know you.”

“Yes sir. We worked together, especially with Mrs. Javits, when I was working for the New York City Mission Society in New York. You were very helpful to us, for which we appreciate it.” He said, “Of course this man is all right. What are we sitting here arguing

about?" And with that it just became sort of like old home week with a group of old colleagues.

As I say, I knew the history of each Senator on the committee, his own background—not that I had to play to that, but I felt privileged being with them—and it was like a group of old friends that I felt comfortable with. In addition, my own friends, who were not in that side of the Congress but from the House of Representatives, apparently had talked with their opposite numbers in the Senate and said, "This is our man," especially from the Appropriations Subcommittee. Others had called other senators to say, "Look, this is our man. Look out for him." So it was a very rewarding experience. I think it was one of the best experiences on that kind of level that I've ever had in my life. Unlike many people who maybe have a great deal of problems or concerns, I was completely at ease.

Q: In these interviews we try to, as much as possible, keep them in the proper time frame. What was our interest in Barbados, Grenada, and the other entities with which you were working?

BRITTON: By the way, since that country came under English rule, the name was Anglicized so it's pronounced Gruh-nada. Like, Antigua is spelled A-n-t-i-g-u-a, but it's pronounced An-tee-ga.

Needless to say, from World War II there was a concern that these islands served as sort of outposts of protection for the US Government. As a matter of fact, on that particular post there were four military installations; two Navy facilities, one missile tracking station, plus a drone launching site. Trinidad at one time was a substantial oil producing country. Going it a step further, those are substantial American Navy bases. There was a considerable interest on the part of the US. We were still broadly expanding our military interests, but suffice to say that we had not begun to cut down on our local military interests. This was in the islands, going from those islands up to the Bahamas and so forth. The Bahamas had substantial military interests, as well as space interests.

So these were some of the things, but, secondly, we were getting a goodly number of people traditionally coming up from the islands on immigration matters. This meant we had to be concerned about what we could do to keep them in the islands, so to speak, and not have them broaching the so-called immigration problems. Jamaica especially was a great exporter of people.

They were beginning to move closer to the US. For example, during my time, the islands systematically gave up the pound as their anchor currency, and went to the American dollar. So we had a number of interests, not an overriding one, but, nevertheless, as these countries became independent they had the same size vote in the general assembly as the US. We had to be concerned.

Q: Where was the embassy located on Barbados?

BRITTON: Bridgetown, Barbados. Barbados has no cities, by the way, only parishes similar to counties. Bridgetown had been the principal community.

Q: How did you find the embassy staff? You were sort of the new boy on the block, did you find that it gave you good support? Were there good people there, not so good, how did you find it?

BRITTON: Fortunately, by the way, one of my long-time friends had come down as the Peace Corps Director. He was a Foreign Service information officer with the US Information Agency. This was helpful to me, both in terms of having a friend, but, in addition, an experienced person and, finally, a person who was experienced in public affairs. My deputy chief of mission was excellent, a person by the name of John Simms. I helped him in many ways. By the same token, from that point on it kind of, you know, the rest of staff were not necessarily the most aggressive or the most supportive people. I had to, hopefully, earn their loyalty and goodwill. Some were hopeless cases, of course. I think there might have been some hostility.

Q: Looking at this from the overall point of view, at some posts there is a tendency not to put in the top-rate people. Barbados would be a place where you might not be getting some of the top-rate people, possibly because the problems weren't major there, as compared to other places.

BRITTON: They can rise to the surface. The Cuban airlift was going through Barbados, among other things. A Cuban plane was sabotaged, you know, it exploded and it crashed. But you're absolutely right.

I remember the clerical secretaries up at the State Department who knew me—I tend to be as friendly as I can with all people regardless of rank or station in life—said, “When we heard that a certain person was going out of here to the field, we jumped for joy. When we heard that he was going to your post, our hearts sank because he was a pain in the neck.” That person was eventually helped out of the Service by another ambassador he worked for because he tended to be a real problem. Yes, the staff varied from excellent to not so excellent.

Q: John Simms, as I recall, went on to bigger and better things.

BRITTON: John had serious problems in South America. He was involved in delivering a man by the name of August Ricord who was one of the leaders in the so-called French connection drug smuggling case. John tried to get this man, who was eventually sentenced to 25 years in jail, back into the States into American hands. John succeeded by working with the host government, but it also caused difficulties for his ambassador, who had resisted this. By the same token, it earned him a negative reputation as one who would go against his ambassador if he felt he was right.

And, by the way, John had some other problems, domestic. We never talked about them, but he had domestic problems. In those past days, if one had problems with one's spouse, one also had problems with one's boss. You could be expelled from the Service, or put out

of the Service, if your spouse was not a very cooperate person. Usually this meant men because there were no women Foreign Service people, by and large. John had that kind of problem, marital problems. He really was having problems, but I found him to be excellent support. He knew his business-he'd been in the Service a goodly number of years. So I not only recommended him for meritorious awards, but also was successful in many respects of getting his promotion, which meant that having gotten a promotion, he was then saved and not subject to being discharged from the Service by virtue of failing to move. So I was very happy with John, and I'm always grateful to him for his help to me.

Q: Could you describe the political situation that you faced when you were on Barbados and Grenada?

BRITTON: The one thing that aptly described the status of Barbados-American relations had to do with the word “destabilization.”

Q: You're talking about Jamaica really, aren't you?

BRITTON: Well, more or less, Barbados. The prime minister of Barbados was a very knowledgeable, wonderful person who, I think, because of a sort of socialist background, never felt quite comfortable with the American government under Richard Nixon. I think Republican politics automatically kind of caused his antennae to go up. So he was cooperative, but . . .

Q: His name was Errol Barrow.

BRITTON: Errol Walton Barrow. He was a little bit cautious and concerned and, needless to say, he possibly had good reason to in the sense that Barbados is a very delicate country. It goes back to 1625, when the first government to form there, or the first communities were formed there. It was always under British control, colonial status. It had a long history of self-government and had become independent in 1966. Errol Barrow had personally worked out the arrangements. He was very proud of his country and

recognizing that Barbados had limited resources, other than human resources, he had to do all that he could to protect them. In this sense, by the way, Barbados had a reputation for always being a country ahead of other countries down there. They always seemed to keep themselves afloat even though they had very limited resources and, by the way, only 166 square miles of land area, 250,000 people roughly.

In the case of Grenada—I was the first ambassador accredited to Grenada—it was headed by a person who was not well-educated by American or British standards. Eric Matthew Gairy, who had been a union leader, a teacher, but who felt himself very much on the rightist side. He was very comfortable with the Republican administration. Unfortunately, because he himself seemed slightly erratic, and because he had come to office at a time when there was some considerable turmoil in Grenada, he was dismissed by the American government, as such.

He often, of course, asked for more economic assistance there, he asked for cultural programs, he asked for an embassy over there, he asked for US military presence. We dismissed him out of hand. By the way, all of those things are in place over there now.

But he's out of office now. As a matter of fact, I understand that he's either blind or near blind. I regret that very much. He was not much of a success in politics after the American arrival there.

Q: Let's go back to Barbados and destabilization. What was that about?

BRITTON: Prime Minister Barrow sometimes campaigned against the US on the basis that the CIA was attempting to destabilize many of these countries because of their relationships with other countries, particularly Cuba. He did not hold very much brief for Cubans, per se, but he respected Cuba's right to exist as a country. As a result, anything that infringed on Cuba had its effect on other countries down there. Each country was expected to not be friendly with Cuba, and Barbados asserted its independence of that. So he was constantly concerned that the CIA might do things to undermine Barbados' status.

I presume, other than the commercial side of it when the Cuban flights were coming through Barbados en route to Angola, it was as much of a defiant show of friendship or independence as it was for the commercial benefits. As I say, he was constantly railing against that. Personally, he was friendly to me. We had a little situation at one point, but we were always the best of friends.

Q: What was that situation?

BRITTON: This had to do with airline rights. It came about in 1976. We were going towards the bicentennial then. By the same token, American Airlines and Pan American had been negotiating to substitute American for Pan American landing in Barbados. Normally, this is a pro-forma procedure, but Barbados was seeking to establish its own airline at the time. Mr. Barrow happened to have been a pilot. He had been personal pilot to one of the leaders of the British Air Force, had quite a bit of experience. He was also a law school graduate in Great Britain.

In seeking to set up this airline, it did not meet the test that the then American Civil Aeronautics Board required of a foreign carrier. It must be 51% owned by foreign nationals, and so forth. Barbados said it had purchased its airline for $250,000, which normally gets you a good supply of gasoline for the airline. By the way, the name of the organization was Caribbean International Airways, which in the Lexicon of an abbreviation of international carriers would have made it CIA. [Laughter] So they changed it to International Caribbean Airways.

The CAB was not impressed with the presentation made to them and insisted on additional information, so they would not give Barbados clearance to land, or recognition as Barbados' national carrier. With that, they refused to give American Airlines a long-term, you know, considerable rights. They gave them a three-months landing right—and also Eastern Airlines. I then went public with a protest that American carriers were being singled out for discriminatory treatment. I'm against discrimination of any kind. That then

caused a reaction from them. I said that I thought they ought to rethink that, and not put the carrier in the position of having to make a choice between the Bicentennial traffic and Barbados.

There was a great need for domestic carriers on the American scene because of the bicentennial, and it would have been very easy then to shift, because they have to make deployments of materials, and people, and equipment, and so forth. I said that it was my considered judgment that the general counsels or attorneys for airlines would not let them make long-term commitments based on a three-month flying permit, that they would tend to be a little bit more cautious. I thought this would hurt Barbados, and I suggested strongly that they should reconsider it, because it really was not helping Barbados. Well, they took it on the basis that I was interfering in the internal affairs of Barbados, and the P.M. attacked me on radio, TV and— Rediffusion the wired radio down there—and said that if I didn't like it, I could always pack up and go home. I had calls from throughout Barbados to say that I was right. Interestingly, it turned out that the entire airline industry, British Airways and others, had been undergoing some of this same kind of, for lack of a better word, harassment, uncertainty. So they were happy that someone had finally spoken out, and they and other foreign carriers suddenly called me to thank me for speaking up on their behalf. I became sort of a hero of the airline industry. I never had to worry about a first-class seat anytime I took a plane going anywhere. [Laughter]

As I say, people were very much favorable to me. The P.M. and I remained good friends. He had his difficulties. When I had some problems, I think it was not too long after that, I lost my oldest son, my namesake, and the biggest floral tribute came from the government of Barbados, the Governor General sent a special note, they sent the ambassador to the United Nations to speak at my son's funeral. By the same token, I have to say he is not just an ambassador. He was President of the Oxford Union. He is currently the foreign minister, and had been the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

So it was not just a typical ambassador, he was a very outstanding person. But we remained friends, and before Errol Barrow was voted out of office—not himself, but his party—he gave a speech at the dedication of a little landing ship tank, which I had helped them to secure. He went out of his way to say that I had done more for Barbados, and perhaps the entire Caribbean, than any ambassador ever posted down there. He pointed out the cultural things I'd brought to the island, the financial help, the military help, the economic help, and so forth. So we were good friends.

Q: I was doing some research before this interview, and there was this Cuban airlift of troops to Angola. Barbados had an airport which brought them closer to Angola.

BRITTON: Yes. It was the last island stop prior to Africa.

Q: Then it ceased, apparently on protest from the United States. Did you get involved with this?

BRITTON: Very much so.

Q: What happened?

BRITTON: We were getting the regular requests from the State Department to protest to the Barbadians that this was an unfriendly act of sorts, you know, to allow the Cubans to land in Barbados and to continue these flights. The notes were going over, representations were being made to the foreign minister, but nothing was being done. Actually, the prime minister also held the defense portfolio. By the way, he died in 1987, I believe. A very untimely loss. He was a good person. But I can say this now, although we were making the representations, they were not getting very far. I always remember that one day—it might have been in mid-summer or early summer—we were having lunch, just the three of us, Earl Barrow, his wife and myself. It was his birthday—again, a measure of our friendship that we were having lunch over at the prime minister's mansion. I said, “Errol, I can appreciate the situation Barbados has been in. When the Cubans come through, you

charge them landing rights, you sell them fuel, you sell them food, you sell them cigarettes, whiskey, almost anything that they want to buy, and you take in a goodly amount of money. Believe me, as a small country, I can understand that this is necessary, and that you do have a need for funds. You don't get that much support from other governments in terms of economics." I said, "However, it is beginning to move towards the tourist season, and you're going to get a large number of tourists coming down. As you know, your largest number of tourists at this moment are from America, and next Canada, and Europe. God forbid it should happen, but if one of these nights one of these Cuban planes lands here and it gets blown up or something like that, your tourists are going to fly to the four winds. Now, God forbid it should happen. In fact, I would never want to see anything like that happen here. But you are pushing it to the limit, that you can create, as far as I'm concerned, problems for Barbados. I'm speaking to you only as a friend. I think you may want to reconsider it, and suggest that maybe it's time to take your winnings and that's about it."

So that night—he didn't comment—he went on the air and denounced the Cubans for using the airlifts and for using the Barbados facilities for military purposes. He said that they were a peaceful country, they were members of the non-aligned movement, and they didn't appreciate that, and unless the Cubans stopped it immediately, they would break relations. That was the end of it.

Q: So it was really a matter of persuasion, rather than holding off and saying, "If you don't do this, we'll do this," or something like that?

BRITTON: Diplomacy is form and it's substance, and it's matters sometimes beyond that. The fact that one could have a good relationship can mean all the difference. For example, I use to spend some Friday afternoons, around 12 to 2 or thereabouts, down at one of the little restaurants in Barbados. Why? Because during that time many of the ministers of government, as well as the opposition would drop in there for drinks or lunch, and it was a chance to talk with them. Quite often they would invite me to come over to the parliament

during their sessions to sit with them for lunch—I mean the government. So these are the kinds of things you build your relationships and your friendships on so that you can influence the course of events without necessarily having to go public, which is how a diplomatic document is, and which sounds as if it's country versus country.

Q: You said that Barbados was an active member of the non-aligned movement. One of the efforts that every American ambassador has to do, particularly when the United Nations meets, is trudge up to the foreign ministers, or the presidents, or prime ministers of a country and say, "Would you please vote the following ways." Often these have very little to do with the country involved. How did this work?

BRITTON: When the United States wants to take a position vis-a-vis a given subject or issue, it notifies all of its ambassadors to make representations to the foreign ministers of their host countries to support the US on this given issue. Now, we can easily be mislead, because the United States is very mechanical, highly electronic, and so forth. We can send out telegrams, telexes, and so forth, and reach our people immediately. Other countries do not have all these kinds of things. In fact, I suspect some of them have to use commercial telegrams, which are expensive. So two things happen; one, you can contact your foreign minister who can then convey to his ambassador at the U.N. his position on a given issue. By the same token, the foreign minister himself may attend the session as representative of his country, or some other minister, or, indeed, the prime minister himself. Errol Barrow used to go directly over to speak to the United Nations.

Finally, there are those representatives who are in the United Nations who have a great deal of autonomy and, either because of abdication or absence of influence from their home country, are sufficiently powerful that they can take an independent position, because they have that kind of relationship with their people back home. So this is actually how it works. If the US wants a given position, number one, the impetus will come from the Secretary of State, probably with the support of the US U.N. representative. But it

means several ways of achieving support from the home country, as well as from the local country. Sometimes, obviously, there are quid pro quos.

Q: How about in Barbados, did you find yourself having to get much involved in the UN votes?

BRITTON: Yes.

Q: Were they responsive, or did you ever get in the quid pro quo business?

BRITTON: Never in a quid pro quo. But by the same token, I remember that the Barbadians—who, by the way, are innately conservative, more conservative than, say, the British, from whom they derive much of their cultural heritage—were never ones to jump up and down enthusiastically and say, “This is what we'll do. Yes, we'll do it.” They would listen very politely and then make their decision. In my time, I thought that most of the decisions went to the support of the US.

Q: You mentioned the United Kingdom. Barbados is part of the Commonwealth, is it?

BRITTON: Yes it is. Grenada is too.

Q: Rather than an ambassador it would then be the High Commissioner, wouldn't it?

BRITTON: Yes, in part. In the Commonwealth, the countries send High Commissioners to each other, where both recognize Queen Elizabeth as Head of State. The UK, Canada, Barbados, and Grenada, among others, exchange High Commissioners.

Q: How about the British role there? Did you find that because the British was such that, what the United Kingdom wanted was more important than what the United States wanted?

BRITTON: No. Stewart Roberts was the British High Commissioner and we were very good friends, as well as Larry Smith from the Canada High Commission. We were all very good friends. We would walk into each other's embassies, you know, no formalities, just free to talk. There was not greater sense of relationship with England as with the US. I would think that Canada had a little bit more of a positive edge. Their foreign policy seemed to be less bellicose.

Q: This was under Trudeau at that time. So it stood a little bit to one side.

BRITTON: Yes. Now, keep in mind, from Prime Minister—what's his name, prior to Trudeau? Not only Lester Pearson, but others.

Q: Diefenbaker.

BRITTON: Diefenbaker. They were regular visitors to Barbados.

Q: [Laughter] Of course, this is the idea, to get the hell out of Canada during the winter.

BRITTON: Yes. They would come down for their vacations, holidays so to speak. Then Errol Barrow would see them in the commonwealth meetings, and commonwealth meetings of finance ministers, because Errol Barrow was finance minister. They'd see them at other meetings. There was much more camaraderie between Canadians and Barbadians. Canada would readily accept the Barbadians coming up for any kind of reasons, medical treatment, what have you. It was cheaper, of course, to go to Canada. Quebec Air, Ward Air, Air Canada, all flew to Barbados from Canada. So there was a closer relationship.

Q: What happened in June of '76? There was an election in which Barrow, after being in there many years, lost out and G.M.J. "Tom" Adams of the Barbados Labor Party came in. Was there a change in relationship at that point?

BRITTON: Between the US and Barbados? No. I had a good relationship with Tom Adams. By the way, his mother and I were also very good friends. She was the wife of Sir Grantley Adams, who was the first and only Prime Minister of the Federation of the West Indies. So I knew Tom, but I had this relationship mainly out great respect for his family. When Tom came in, I knew a goodly number of his people. Some people said, and erroneously so, that the BLP was my party, because they leaned more towards the Republicans and they got along much more with the United States. That wasn't completely true. I mean, I was friends with all of them, but some said that the BLP got into office because of their friendship with me. But I didn't influence that. I would say that the death of the Governor General just about that time also had a significant impact on it. He and I were very, very close friends. He was the first black Governor General of the country and was a much respected and much loved personality. He died just as the transition was going on. In fact, two weeks after my son died he sent me a very long letter and flowers. He'd been trained, by the way, at Howard University in medicine.

Q: I noticed that in October of '76 there were two Americans who were kicked out of the country for supposedly trying to destabilize his government. What was that all about? I have the names, Robert Vergo and Gary Kopaladora. Does that ring a bell with you? I just saw some notice in the paper.

BRITTON: No. Are you sure they were in Barbados?

Q: Maybe I got it wrong. How about with the government of Grenada?

BRITTON: Those people were over in Grenada.

Q: Maybe it was Grenada. Did you have much of a problem there? Later on we ended up sending troops in there in '81 or '82.

BRITTON: I'd say it was about '84.

Q: It was '84, I guess. That's right. At that point, was this just a relatively quiet area with no particular concern to us?

BRITTON: Grenada was weak. It had no defense force, it had a small police force. Barbados, by the way, trained police for the entire Caribbean. Grenada was weak, economically it was poor and backwards. So it was very easy for individuals to come in and offer money to tempt officials, I think, or to do things and it wasn't easy to apprehend them. For example, I think those two persons—it's hard for me to remember, but if I can recall—they might have some kind of so-called gangster connection.

Q: I think these were two men who were wanted by the FBI for bad checks on race tracks.

BRITTON: That's right. I remember it now. They were in Grenada. They Grenadians were not anxious to deliver them over to the FBI. There's always an assumption that somebody has been paid off, and it can happen. But I'm not quite sure that the extradition treaties were necessarily proper. I don't remember everything about it. It's something that we, as Americans, can get righteously indignant about that say maybe Americans have done and have suddenly said, “Well, we should have them brought back here”, we assume that another country is willing to forego its rights to please America.

Q: As a professional Foreign Service officer, I know exactly what you mean. We tend to expect much more of other than we are willing to . . .

BRITTON: Well, we apply our own local standards. We are very insular in that sense. Whenever a person says, “Well, he was put in jail without being charged, and he was held without being given a right to a lawyer, or read his rights.”

You have to ask, “Wait a minute, what do you think you're talking about? This is not America.”

“Yes, but their's is a small country and we can just wipe them off.” This kind of thing.

Q: It's a very difficult thing to get across. In reference to that, how much interest at the time was there from the State Department under Henry Kissinger and others with what was happening in the Caribbean? Was it minimal?

BRITTON: Minimal, because there were other problems—the detente situation in the Soviet Union. I remember during that time, for example, President Ford landed in Vladivostok, which I don't think any foreigner had gone into Vladivostok since the days of Lenin—nor since! [Laughter]

Q: [Laughter] I don't think so either.

BRITTON: So there were problems with that, and they were coming through the relationship with China. George Bush had gone over there as head of the US liaison office—it wasn't an embassy. Israel and Egypt were still kind of cranking up at each other. So they had some major problems, plus Mexico was a continuing problem.

Q: Central America was not aflame, as it later became, so that there wasn't much attention. Did you feel the hand of Kissinger on what you were doing?

BRITTON: I thought that we had such excellent representation in Barbados that it wasn't necessary for him to get involved. He could sleep peacefully knowing that I was down in Barbados. [Laughter]

It is a test if there's a country undergoing a lot of turmoil and attacks on the US, or something. You ask, “What are you doing to present out position down there? Why are people so hostile?” And, by the way, if they're hostile towards an ambassador, they can be doing all of this without regard to the country. Suffice to say, we were having good relationships. In fact, I knew Maurice Bishop well in Grenada and had a very good relationship with him.

Q: He later turned into getting into the New Jewel movement.

BRITTON: It wasn't later, it was previously. You see, during the sort of disturbances leading to independence in 1974, before Grenada became independent, one person was killed in that uprising and that was Maurice Bishop's father. He was killed by the person who later became the Commissioner of police. Okay. There was a commission out of the Caribbean headed by the former chief justice of Jamaica. His name was Dufuss, the Dufuss Commission, which didn't exactly exonerate this person, but it at least let him get off the hook.

Now, when the New Jewel Movement came in and took over during the absence of Gairy, the one person that was killed during that disturbance was the chief of police, who, of course, had killed Bishop's father.

Bishop himself was a well-educated person, a law school graduate from the English system, very calm and dedicated person, who would work very consistently for what he thought was a better Grenada. It's sad that events overtook him. It wasn't that he was such a harsh person that he was killed by his enemies who were irate over his being mistreated or something like that. His problem was that he was too good for the crowd that he was with.

Q: At the time, did you have much of a problem with American tourists getting into difficulties? Did you spend a lot of your time trying to get them out of trouble?

BRITTON: There were times when they had problems, but basically their problems were minor. I remember that I earned the hostility of one of my officers down there. An American called him on Sunday morning to ask him for help, because he needed some proof for one of his children to get back into the States and he had none. His children weren't being allowed on the airplane because one didn't look exactly like him, you know, and his wife, they being blond, he was brunette. So it was something in which I really felt that the embassy should have gone out of its way to help him. The duty person refused to deal with him, and told him to come into the office on Monday morning. Well, if you miss a

plane on Sunday morning, and you come into the office on Monday morning, you will not go out until Tuesday morning.

Q: Very expensive.

BRITTON: Yes, expensive and inconvenient. Secondly, we're in there to look out for American interests, as far as I'm concerned, and American interests start with your individual voters. He came in and, of course, we took care of him. I was a little bit concerned that the duty person did not go out of his way. I said, “Now, anytime you need time off you can get it, if there was a real problem say, other kinds of problems, you could have worked out something else. But you're the person on duty. If you don't do it, who will?” But it didn't go down well then, and it later came back to haunt me. This person made some disparaging remarks about me later. But that's the kind of thing that you get.

I was always concerned that we look out for Americans' well-being. There were the usual illnesses, deaths of Americans, rarely ever a person being held in jail. Even when some men were unfortunately apprehended in Antigua with substantial quantities of narcotics, they were given a $10,000 bail, which is $5,000 US, and they paid that bail and went out of that country before a twinkle of an eye.

Q: Out of their petty cash fund, probably. [Laughter]

BRITTON: Yes, out of their petty cash fund. They were being trailed by US drug enforcement agents. But those kinds of things happen. There was never a serious problem.

I got into one with Robert Bradshaw up in St. Kitts, the Premier who was giving some of our American colleagues a hard time. I called him, and he used it as a little political ploy to say that the American ambassador called him to try to influence him in these things.

But on the other hand, Robert Bradshaw was the first Caribbean official to visit my residence. Although he was British to the core, he was a very staunch admirer of the US and he treated me royally whenever I went up there. They said, “You can always tell who were his favorites by the way he assigned his people to look after them.” He always looked after me.

Q: How about problems with immigration to the United States. Was this a problem for you as the ambassador?

BRITTON: It was in the sense that there was continuing concern with immigration, how people were treated, and so forth. We treated them well, we didn't always comply with their wishes, but we treated them well. Basically, they responded.

Q: We don't have to talk about this, but you alluded to the fact that you had problems with the duty officer who later caused you problems. What I'm really looking at is how the system works, for somebody who doesn't know anything about the State Department. Can you give some idea what the problem was?

BRITTON: I was talking to John Gavin one day, who was ambassador to Mexico—of course, he had a very close relationship with the US President, which is always helpful because you can pick up the phone and call him. I said, “John, you have a gentleman on your staff who can be a real problem to you. But let me warn you. If he becomes a problem, don't send him back to the State Department, which is your right, because he will spend his time walking up and down the hallways badmouthing you. In the meantime, you will be down here trying to do your job, and there is no way you can deal with it because you can't fight back. You've got to keep that person on your staff and in your sight.”

John said, “Yes, I appreciate it.”

It's interesting that ultimately they promoted this gentleman on the condition that he retire the next day. There were some problems in terms of his evaluation reports. He had gotten

to the extent that even the person who was his boss—he's still in the State Department, a very highly placed person—said, “Oh my goodness. I just can't handle him at all.” They were able to get him to retire and leave. In that sense, I had a note from John Gavin after he returned. He said, “I never understood how a worm like that could get into the Department, and just stay there systematically and not be dealt with.”

I said, “Keep in mind that those of us who are political appointees come in and we're considered the novices. A person like that, who has survived and gotten through the system for ten or twelve years, is considered a career professional Foreign Service officer.”

No one ever mentioned when this gentleman was giving me problems, that my own deputy chief of mission, who had been in the Service some 27 years, had recommended that he be dismissed from the Service. This was in his fitness report, but that would never be mentioned.

Q: There is a problem that there are people who can last. One of the unfortunate things is that—I speak from some experiences as a personnel officer—it's a lot easier to send them off to Barbados than to send them to Moscow or Lebanon, where you really are concerned and you don't want to put somebody like that in the hot spot.

BRITTON: The unknowing chief of mission may utilize his authority or power to deal with such person at a time when that may not be the way to do it. The easiest thing is that he (the officer) be recalled. But that's not the answer.

Q: No. I think this is for passing on to future generations, the idea that sometimes it's better not to send somebody back, and do your disciplining and correction there, rather than let them badmouth you back . . .

BRITTON: Of course, there's a problem too, if you're speaking for the education or edification of future appointees. If the ambassador does not try to run every detail of

the embassy himself, he can keep a sort of dispassionate view of how things are done and rely upon his subordinates, particularly his deputy, to run things, and he can keep a sort of overall, generalized view, and look to his deputy for the performance and proper evaluation. Now, that's always tricky. It works both ways.

Let's say, for example, in my case, I had some hostility to this person in Barbados because of his performance or his approach to things, and that might have been strictly the prerogative my deputy. As it was, my deputy agreed, and he agreed not because he was the kind of person who was currying favor by agreeing, but because he was professional enough to feel this way. As a result, of course, my action should have been his action, perhaps. By taking that action, I opened myself up, because here, after two years, I was still—in fact, less than two years—in a sense, the novice mistreating a career professional. I love the career professionals, and I have great respect for them. In fact, that was part of my problem. I could not understand how a person such as that person could survive.

Suffice to say, I think that it is something that every ambassador has to realize that he has to be very careful about how he uses his authority, as opposed to using other people to achieve the same ends.

Q: I know you are under some time constraints here. Is there anything else we'd like to talk about or cover that I haven't asked about?

BRITTON: I would only say this, in terms of my general pleasure at being there, having the family there. It was a wonderful experience, something I'm always grateful that I was able to enjoy.

My relationship with the Governor General, who while representing the Queen, was also a person who had been educated in the States and while very concerned with his prerogatives, was also partial to me both as a person and my country. I knew a large number of his friends from New York—he had practiced medicine in New York. In addition, by virtue of the way I presented myself, he went out of his way to show himself also as a

friend. He would go out of his way to call me at times, or to ask for things, or invite me to places and so forth. I enjoyed all of that.

Q: Looking on it, what do you feel was your greatest accomplishment? What gave you the greatest satisfaction of your time in Barbados?

BRITTON: I think the greatest satisfaction was just being the number one American family in this foreign country, and being recognized as such. Black American children growing up can be made to feel important because they're human beings and because they're accomplishing something or have accomplished something. It's another thing, of course, to see their parents, particularly their father, as a person of some accomplishment having done something.

I have five children. One did not come down, he was the one in service—and a little grandson as well. The fact that they could see their father being as recognized as some one important was the greatest satisfaction to me personally.

There have been very few black American ambassadors. As a matter of fact, at this point, there are 37 living former and present American ambassadors, including the first person ever to be granted ambassadorial status, Edward R. Dudley, who is from New York. On the other hand, the first black Foreign Service officer who became ambassador, Clifton R. Wharton Sr. is retired in Phoenix, Arizona. There are very few, in fact, at this very moment there are five in post and they're all in Africa.

So Black Americans do not have this kind of interchange with heads of government, heads of state, such as white ambassadors or white Americans do in general. This was very important even in such a case as my meeting Queen Elizabeth in Barbados. The Governor General came along and introduced me. Interestingly, how she happened to be introduced lead to a conversation that must have taken something like five or ten minutes, and by this time my colleagues down the lines, both the resident ambassadors and the visiting ones, were all curious as to what was going on up there. Well, my friend, the Governor

General, just enthused over the fact that the Queen should spend all of this time. I pointed out that I hadn't seen her since 1940, and how happy she looked. I always remembered her, her sister, her father and mother, but especially the relationship between herself and her sister, and how happy they seemed to have been. It was just such a pleasure to watch them. This brought back all kinds of memories to her—it was at the World's Fair in New York City—and she just so happy that one could remember that. She said, “But you were so small.”

I said, “Yes, ma'am. Both of us were small then.” [Laughter] She talked about how happy they were, the fact that it was the last trip she had been able to take a trip with her father, the war began, the fact that he got sick and eventually died, and her responsibilities increased. It was like two people just kind of holding a personal conversation to the exclusion of everybody else. It wasn't a matter of this, that and so forth, but it was just, “I haven't seen you such a long time. What are you doing these days? It's good to see you.” That was one of the high points, needless to say. Barbadians ate that up, that the American ambassador should have such a close relationship with the Queen. Obviously, you're nobody unless you're somebody in Barbados. That's the British system, at times.

This made a profound impression and it sort of set the tone for my stay in Barbados. People speculated: “This person must have been either high up in the circles back in the States, or he has some kind of personal presence about him that made it possible for the Queen—she didn't do it as sort of a condescension because he happened to have been the only black ambassador, or that he was a senior, he was the most junior.” But the point was that as a person, something came up that captured her attention.

Q: This is a question we ask of everyone, but I'll phrase it a little differently. If a young black college student came to you and said, “Should I try for the Foreign Service?”, what would you say?

BRITTON: I happen to be Secretary-Treasurer of the Association of Black American Ambassadors and sort of a managing person. Yes, I do. I try to tell them that the Foreign Service is not only the State Department. There are many different aspects to it. For example, the Foreign Commercial Service of Commerce.

Q: Foreign Agricultural Service, Treasury . . .

BRITTON: Defense, Treasury. You name it, there are many different avenues. I sent two of the people, for example, who were most prominent in foreign policy at that point, General Powell, whom I went out of my way to meet and get a friendship with him, had come through the military route, and others. I do encourage them, because I thing that Black Americans should be cognizant of foreign policy and US foreign concerns—not only Black Americans, but all Americans should be concerned. We should encourage them to become interested and to try to follow it even if they should arrive at the top, as far as ambassadors are concerned. There are many other areas of showing their concern. They should be interested in world affairs. I do encourage all of that.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you very much for this interview.

BRITTON: Thank you very much Mr. Kennedy.

End of interview